

# Rules for the operation of Cross-Party Groups

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The Welsh Parliament is the democratically elected body that represents the interests of Wales and its people. Commonly known as the Senedd, it makes laws for Wales, agrees Welsh taxes and holds the Welsh Government to account.

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## **1. Introduction**

- 1.** Cross-Party Groups are widely recognised as a valuable part of the democratic process. It is equally important that there is openness and transparency in the way that groups operate.
- 2.** These rules for the operation of Cross-Party Groups replace the 'Presiding Officers' Guidelines on the Formation of Cross-Party Groups', which were made on 10 March 2004.
- 3.** All existing Senedd Cross-Party Groups are subject to these new Rules from the date on which they come into effect.

## **2. Definition and Status**

- 4.** The purpose of Senedd Cross-Party Groups is to provide a forum for Members of the Senedd from different parties to meet in order to consider and discuss shared interests in particular subjects.
- 5.** Cross-Party Groups are not formal Senedd groupings and are not, therefore, bound by any of the Senedd's Standing Orders. They have no formal role in policy development.
- 6.** Cross-Party Groups may be set up by Members in respect of any subject area relevant to the Senedd, but should not attempt to replicate the functional areas covered by Senedd committees, nor do they have any of the powers of a Senedd Committee (e.g. they cannot summon witnesses or Ministers to attend meetings or to provide documentation, and they cannot use the Senedd for Wales logo or branding).

## **3. Membership**

- 7.** A Group must include Members from at least three political party groups represented within the Senedd.
- 8.** Groups may also include members from outside the Senedd Membership of individuals from outside the Senedd is at the discretion of the Group.

## **4. Election of Office Holders**

- 9.** Each group should elect a Chair and a Secretary.
- 10.** The Chair of the Group must be a Member of the Senedd. The Group's Secretary may be a Member of the Senedd, a Member's support Staff, or an

individual from outside the Senedd. However, in the case of the group appointing a Secretary who is not an Member of the Senedd, that person must not act without the prior approval of the Chair of the Group, and all notices, correspondence, documentation and other arrangements relating to the activities of the Group must be issued in the name of the Chair.

**11.** A group must normally meet to elect its office-holders. It is expected that office holders will initially be elected at an inaugural annual general meeting. However, office holders may also be elected at other meetings of the group. Following any election of an office-holder, the Chair of the group should notify the change within four weeks, using the registration form at annex A.

## **5. Registration**

**12.** Following the holding of an inaugural AGM or election of office-holders by another means, Cross-Party Groups should register using the appropriate registration form. The form must be signed by the group's Chair and list the membership, which must include at least two other Members of the Senedd from two other party groups within the Senedd, and names of all Members of the group who are not Members of the Senedd.

**13.** The details on the registration forms will be published by Senedd Commission officials on the relevant Cross-Party Groups' section of the Senedd's website.

**14.** For the purposes of holding an Annual General Meeting, existing Senedd Cross-Party Groups will be expected to hold an AGM within 12 months of the date of these rules coming into effect. Groups registered after this date will be expected to hold an AGM within 12 months of registration.

## **6. Re-registration of Cross-Party Groups after a Period of Dissolution**

**15.** Groups must re-register at the start of each new Senedd following elections.

## **7. Recording Changes**

**16.** The Chair of the group is responsible for notifying any changes to group details, including changes to office holders, by submitting an amended registration form. Changes should be notified within four weeks of coming into effect, and will be published on the relevant Cross-Party Groups' section of the Senedd's website.

## Holding Meetings

### 8. Use of Senedd Facilities and Resources

- 17.** Cross-Party Groups do not take precedence over formal Senedd business and so will have access to the Senedd's accommodation facilities only subject to availability.
- 18.** Senedd Building room bookings for Cross-Party Group meetings must be made by the Chair of the Group. That Member of the Senedd will also be responsible for all meeting arrangements including meeting and escorting external members of the Group within the Senedd Building.
- 19.** Cross-Party Groups do not have access to any of the Senedd Commission staffing services such as committee services, with the exception of Welsh to English simultaneous interpretation at meetings held on the Senedd Estate. This may be provided if requested by the Chair of the Group.
- 20.** Cross-Party Groups must respect the limitations on the use of Senedd facilities and resources. Members may make reasonable use of the Senedd's telephone, fax, photocopying, IT facilities and Senedd stationery in pursuit of Cross-Party business or in order to fulfil the requirements of these rules, e.g. to provide information for publication on the Senedd's website.
- 21.** The Chair of the Cross-Party Group will be responsible for ensuring that the group complies with the rules on use of Senedd facilities and resources. Outside organisations and individuals associated with Cross-Party Groups are not entitled to use the Senedd's resources.

### 9. Provision of Information in the Official Languages of the Senedd

- 22.** All information provided by the Senedd Commission about Cross-Party Groups that is required to be published on the Senedd's website under these rules, will be available in English and Welsh subject to the provisions of the Senedd (Official Languages) Act 2012 and related Senedd Commission Official Languages Scheme. This includes membership, meeting dates and venues, minutes of all meetings including the Annual General Meeting, and the annual financial statement.
- 23.** Arrangements for translating any Cross-Party Group documentation that is not required to be published on the Senedd's website must be made by the Cross-Party Group itself.

## **10. Senedd Access Fund**

**24.** The Access Fund has been established to ensure that Members of the Senedd have the necessary support to engage with constituents with diverse needs, and provide additional support to disabled Members and disabled support staff.

**25.** The Access Fund may not be used for the provision of text translation into the Senedd's official languages or Welsh to English interpretation for Member-sponsored events which are organised by external bodies.

**26.** If the Chair of a Cross Party Group considers that the CPG needs support to allow it to engage with constituents with diverse needs, for example to interpret a language that is not an official language of the Senedd, and this support cannot be provided from within the group's own membership, then they may wish to submit a business case to Members' Business Support for access to the Fund. Full guidance on the Access Fund can be found on the Members' Intranet. In submitting a business case for financial support the Chair should give consideration to the status of Cross-Party Groups, which do not constitute formal Senedd proceedings.

## **11. Advance Notice of Meetings**

**27.** It will normally be for the Chair of the Group to undertake publicising meeting times, venues etc. If this is delegated to the group's Secretary, then that person must only act with the prior approval of the Chair of the Group, and all notices, correspondence, documentation and other arrangements relating to the activities of the Group must be issued in the name of the Chair.

**28.** The Chair of the Group should provide details of meeting times and venues to the designated Senedd Commission officials in order for these to be published on the Cross-Party Groups section of the website.

## **12. Financial Rules and Registering Interests**

**29.** There will be no Senedd budget to cover the running costs of Cross-Party Groups, with the exception of provisions under sections 8-10 above. The members of the group must meet any other such costs themselves.

**30.** Cross-Party Groups must bear in mind the integrity of the Senedd in considering the acceptance of any monies, gifts, hospitality etc. from outside bodies. In particular, individual Members are required to comply with the rules on registration and declaration of financial interests in connection with any activity

they undertake within, or on behalf of, Cross-Party Groups – as set out in Standing Order 2.

**31.** In particular Section 5 of the Annex to Standing Order 2 sets out the registrable interests. This includes; "(iv) gifts, hospitality, material benefits or advantage above a value specified in any resolution of the Senedd..." and "(v) any remuneration or other material benefit which a Member [...] receives from any public or private company or other body which has tendered for, is tendering for, or has, a contract with the Senedd."

**32.** The Senedd resolved on 10 May 2006 that the specified financial values above which gifts, hospitality and any other benefits must be registered/declared is 0.5 per cent of the basic gross annual Senedd salary for a Member of the Senedd.

**33.** A Member of the Senedd who takes part in Senedd proceedings without having complied with the rules on registration of interests commits a criminal offence under section 36 of the Government of Wales Act 2006.

**34.** In addition to the requirement for individual Members of Cross-Party Groups to register any monies, gifts, hospitality or other benefits from outside bodies in the Senedd's Register of Interests (in accordance with Standing Order 2), the Cross-Party Group's Annual Report should list all benefits received by the group as a whole, or its individual Members, from outside bodies. This includes any secretariat or other support or services provided to the group.

**35.** Members are also reminded of the provisions of Standing Order 2.8, which prohibits lobbying for reward or recognition and which, under Section 36 of the Government of Wales Act is a criminal offence. Lobbying for reward and recognition is defined in Standing Orders as advocating or initiating "any cause or matter on behalf of any body or individual in any proceedings of the Senedd, or "urging any other Member to advocate or initiate any cause or matter in any such proceedings, in return for any payment or benefit in kind, direct or indirect, which the Member, or to the Member's knowledge his or her spouse, has received or expects to receive."

### **13. Annual General Meeting and Annual Report and Financial Statement**

**36.** The Chair of the Cross-Party Group must call an Annual General Meeting (AGM) of the group every 12 months, at which the group must nominate and vote for office holders (see 'Election of Office Holders' section above). The election of



office holders must take place formally at the AGM even if office holder(s) have already been appointed at a recent meeting.

**37.** The first meeting of the group will be its inaugural AGM. After each subsequent AGM the Chair of the Cross-Party Group must, within six weeks, issue an Annual Report and Financial Statement. This report must include:

the membership of the group and names of its office-holders;

the number of times the group has met since the last AGM, who attended, and a summary of the issues discussed;

all professional lobbyists, and voluntary or charitable organisations with whom the group has met during the preceding year; and

an Annual Financial Statement setting out the group's expenses, benefits and hospitality received. The statement must include a breakdown of costs of all goods and services provided, and benefits received, and the names of the provider(s).

**38.** The Annual Report and Financial Statement must be published on the 'Cross-Party Groups' section of the Senedd's website.

## **14. Minutes of Meetings**

**39.** The Chair of the Cross-Party Group will be responsible for ensuring that the minutes of every meeting of the group are provided to the designated Senedd Commission officials within four weeks of the meeting taking place. The minutes must include details of where the meeting was held, who attended the meeting, including the names and titles of group office-holders such as the Chair and Secretary, group members and external visitors or guests, and a brief description of the issues discussed. The minutes will be published on the relevant Cross-Party Groups' section of the Senedd's website.

## **15. Compliance with the Rules**

**40.** While all Members of the Senedd who are members of a Cross-Party Group have a responsibility to ensure that the group conducts itself properly, the Chair of the Group, as signatory of the registration form, will be held primarily responsible for ensuring that the group complies with the rules.

**41.** Failure to comply with, or contravention of the rules on Cross-Party Groups covering registration, election of office-holders, holding of AGMs or provision of

information required by the rules, could lead to withdrawal of recognition of the group on the authority of the Presiding Officer (the group would be de-registered and all details removed from the Senedd's website).

**42.** Any Member who has a concern about the interpretation of the rules should consult the Senedd Commission official(s) responsible for handling registration of Cross-Party Groups in the first instance.

**43.** Any complaint concerning personal standards of conduct, the proper use of Senedd resources and/or the proper registration of interests in accordance with Standing Order 2, in relation to a Member's involvement in Cross-Party Group activity, will be handled by the Standards Commissioner and Standards of Conduct Committee in accordance with the Senedd's Procedure for Dealing with Complaints against Members of the Senedd. This may lead to sanctions being imposed on an individual Member.

**44.** The Standards of Conduct Committee may from time to time consider a paper from the Commission officials dealing with the registration of information about the activities of Cross-Party Group and, if necessary make recommendations to the Presiding Officer concerning compliance with these rules.